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**First Distinguished Visiting Professor, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, at UMM this spring**

*Summary:*

(December 1, 2004)-The University of Minnesota, Morris announces the appointment of renowned historian and scholar, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, as the inaugural holder of UMM's first Distinguished Visiting Professorship in the Liberal Arts. The appointment of Dr. Reagon, an internationally recognized professional in the field of the humanities, represents an historic moment in the academic life of the college, elevating UMM to the ranks of other distinctive liberal arts colleges, most of them older, where endowed professorships are hallmarks of the academic tradition. Dr. Reagon's stay at UMM is scheduled from April 26 through May 5.

"This is a spectacular appointment, for an exciting new program at UMM," said UMM Chancellor Sam Schuman.

"This is highly significant for UMM," said Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean, John F. Schwaller.

The Distinguished Visiting Professorship was made possible thanks to a generous Campaign Minnesota contribution by Dr. Elizabeth "Bettina" Blake, UMM vice chancellor and academic dean emerita and professor emerita of French. Her gift was matched by the University of Minnesota's Permanent University Fund.

"I am extremely pleased to learn that the first Visiting Professor is to be at UMM in 2005. My expectation was that it would take much longer to launch the project," said Blake. "It is thanks to many people at Morris and in the larger University, including President Bruininks and the University Foundation, that funds are already available to bring a distinguished scholar in the humanities to the campus this spring.

"The Visiting Professorship can be important for UMM in several ways," continued Blake. "Other colleges of the University of Minnesota have professorships -- visiting or permanent -- in their specialties. The specialty of the University of Minnesota, Morris is undergraduate liberal arts, so there is symbolic value in having a Distinguished Visiting Professorship in the Liberal Arts. It is a public confirmation of our mission and of our pride in it. Because appointments to the position are temporary, the professorship can be held by nationally recognized scholars in different liberal arts fields. The plan is to offer the opportunity for a visiting professor to each of UMM's academic divisions in turn over the years, as the endowment allows."

Dr. Reagon, a professor emerita of American University and curator emerita of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, is also a composer and song leader in the 19th century Southwest Georgia choral tradition. She founded the Grammy award-winning African American female a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey In the Rock in 1973.

Dr. Reagon will teach courses and work with the choirs at UMM. In addition, she will give two public lectures, as well as a public performance on May 3 at Assumption Church in Morris.

“It is our intention to maximize her contact with students, to give students an opportunity to meet with Dr. Reagon, a national and international professional in the field,” said Schwaller.

“The advantage for Morris students, faculty and staff members is the intellectual enrichment that a distinguished visitor from another college or university brings to campus when the person is in residence for more than the time of a single lecture,” added Blake. “The interchange of ideas that goes on is stimulating for everyone involved, especially on a campus that is geographically isolated. Perhaps equally valuable is having well known and influential people in the academic world experience UMM in depth while teaching here. Over the years, if the Visiting Professors are selected carefully, there will come to be key people in many universities who speak knowledgeably about the quality of a UMM education and who may be able to open doors for our alumni and for UMM faculty members looking for sabbatical posts or research endorsements.

“The region, the state, and the larger University should also benefit from the presence of a succession of visiting scholars on the Morris campus. I hope the visitors will participate in appropriate ways in the life of the community and will also be invited to make at least one presentation in the Twin Cities, Duluth, or Crookston. Sharing a scholar's expertise with others increases her or his own visibility, obviously, but it also adds to the prestige of UMM,” said Blake.

Schwaller concurred: “Dr. Reagon will learn that UMM is an important part of higher education in the U.S.,” he said. “We hope that she will tell others about the high quality students and program we have here at UMM”

Dr. Reagon’s numerous publications include *We'll Understand It Better By and By: African American Pioneering Gospel Composers* (Smithsonian Press, 1992) and *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock...Still on the Journey* (Anchor Books, 1993), a book chronicling the history of Sweet Honey In The Rock, for which she served as editor.

Dr. Reagon has served as consultant composer and performer for several film and video projects, including two award-winning programs for PBS, “Eye on the Prize” (Blackside Productions) and “We Shall Overcome” (Ginger Productions). Dr. Reagon conceptualized the National Public Radio and Smithsonian Peabody Award winning radio series “Wade in the Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions.” A 1989 recipient of MacArthur Fellowship, she was awarded the Presidential Medal, the 1995 Charles Frankel Prize for outstanding contribution to public understanding of the humanities, by the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1996, she received an Isadora Duncan award for the score to *Rock*, a ballet directed by Alonzo King for LINES Contemporary Ballet Company.

The University of Minnesota, Morris has also received a generous, unsolicited contribution of \$55,000 from University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks, in conjunction with the inauguration of the Distinguished Visiting Professorship, in order to provide a guest suite at LaFave House. LaFave House, located at 305 College Avenue, will undergo renovation to the first floor master bedroom, bathroom, hallway and screen porch. Renovation is scheduled to be completed in time to provide accommodations for Dr. Reagon.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at [morris.umn.edu](http://morris.umn.edu) or call 888-866-3382.